

AN
ENQUIRY

WHICH OF THE TWO PARTIES

IS

BEST ENTITLED TO FREEDOM?

THE SLAVE

OR THE

SLAVE-HOLDER?

FROM

An Impartial Examination of the Conduct

OF EACH PARTY, AT THE BAR

OF

PUBLIC JUSTICE.

"The Evidence that you shall give before the King, and Jury sworn, shall be the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, &c."

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M.DCCC.XXIV.

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ENQUIRY,

&c. &c,

THE Gradual Abolitionists say, the West Indian Negroes are unfit to be intrusted with liberty. Even *Mr. Brougham*, says they are unfit*. This he says, at the very moment when he is bringing their fitness to the severest test, that of their *conduct* during the late insurrection at Demerara. *Why* are they unfit to be intrusted with liberty? What evidences have they given of their unfitness?

How timid are the boldest, how cold the warmest advocates of these oppressed creatures! But we will bring their conduct into a wider court, before a still more impartial jury than that where this gratuitous verdict has been given. We will bring it into the

* See the debate of the 1st of June, on the Demerara business.

open court of public opinion, and refer it to the honest decision of public justice, nothing doubting, but we shall obtain for them a more favourable verdict.

We take it for granted that the conduct of the Demerara slaves affords a pretty fair specimen of what may be reasonably expected from the general body of West-Indian Negroes, and shall therefore confine ourselves, principally to the investigation of their conduct during the late insurrection in that colony; the public will then estimate the justice of the charge so inconsiderately (not to say unfeelingly) brought against them, “that they are unfit to be intrusted with liberty.”

Now to the proof. By the fruit, the tree is to be known;—by their actions, the capacities and dispositions of the actors are to be estimated. Let us try the capacities and dispositions of these traduced Negroes by this infallible test. The evidence to be adduced shall be of the most unquestionable authority. It shall be selected from no suspicious quarter, from no source contaminated even with the suspicion of disaffection or fanaticism. It shall be from a publication of the highest authenticity, conducted by men of the most sober, dispassionate judgment, the most loyal and

orthodox principles. And lest our own acknowledged warm interest in the subject, should betray us into any unintentional exaggeration, we shall confine ourselves to the very expressions of the *Christian Observer*.*

“ In consequence of the intolerance of the local authorities of Demerara with respect to religious instruction, it became necessary for the Missionaries to apply for relief to the British Government, and in 1811, instructions were transmitted by Lord Liverpool (then Secretary of State for the Colonial Department) to the Governor of Demerara which obviated the many hindrances thrown in the way of the attendance of the slaves upon religious worship. In consequence of these judicious instructions, things proceeded with little or no interruption, until the month of May 1823, when Governor Murray, issued new restrictions on the freedom of religious worship, which prohibited the slaves from going to their chapel, even on a Sunday, without a written pass; and as their managers were not compelled to give passes to the slaves, the obstacles to their attendance were thus greatly increased. Passes were either entirely refused or given when it was too late to make use of them.

* See No, 267, page 154-161.

Many of the slaves, to whom passes were refused, resolved to brave all hazards, rather than forsake the worship of God, and *cart-whippings on this account, are said to have become frequent.* Some planters, so interpreted the proclamation of the Governor, as to prohibit the slaves from religious exercises, even in their own houses, without leave of their manager. In some cases they were prohibited; and, in others, their religious books were taken from the slaves and destroyed. We know the exaltation of mind which suffering for the sake of religion is capable of generating. Some of the slaves persevered in their attendance at chapel, and in their religious exercises at home, notwithstanding the penalties. In one case, a whole family, which had distinguished itself by firmness in enduring punishment rather than omit the worship of God, was advertised for sale, with the design of separating its members and scattering them to a distance from each other.

Such was the state of things in the following months of June and July, when the dispatch of Lord Bathurst arrived in the Colony, requiring the flogging of women to be abolished, and the whip to be laid aside in the field, as an instrument of coercion in the hands of the driver. At this time the public

mind was much excited; it was well known among the slave population, that something was going forward for their benefit, although the colonial newspapers were prohibited from touching upon the subject. The Court of Policy met, continued its sittings for several days, adjourned, and again adjourned a fortnight afterwards, (Mr. Brougham says seven weeks elapsed) without any public or private official communication on the subject.

It may be easily conceived, in what a state of perturbation and anxiety the Negroes must have been kept, during this protracted period of suspense. Every thing dear to them was at issue, and knowing the men to whose decision their fate and that of their children was left, their alarms and apprehensions might surely be pardoned.

It appears, that the information respecting Lord Bathurst's dispatch, reached the slaves through the Governor's own domestics, who informed some of them that "it was really true about their freedom." Whatever truth there may be in the assertion, that several proprietors began to lay aside the whip in the field, it is certain that the bulk of the planters pursued a different course; some of them, in open and insolent con-

tempt and derision of Lord Bathurst's instructions, sent their drivers into the field armed with two whips, instead of one !

Can we wonder at the extraordinary excitement which all these circumstances produced among the slaves ? Was it possible that men, writhing under the lash, and witnessing its shameful infliction on the bared bodies of their wives and daughters, when they learnt on good authority, that these severities had been proscribed by the supreme authority of the state, though they were nevertheless continued and even aggravated by their managers ; was it possible for men in such circumstances, to remain in a state of undisturbed quiet serenity, without a single movement for their own relief ? It was utterly impossible. The object of the movement which they did make, was to obtain from the constituted authorities of the colony, an explicit declaration of the intentions of the Government towards them and to ascertain what their future condition was to be. They therefore agreed to lay aside their tools ; in other words, *to strike work*, until they obtained the requisite satisfaction.

The 18th of August was the day chosen for the purpose. They seized such arms as they could obtain

which, however, were few in number; and they confined in the stocks several Overseers and Managers, who were either resisting their proceedings, or quitting the estates to spread the alarm of insurrection; they are also said to have fired some shots, and to have roughly handled some individuals. But even this degree of violence appears to have been beyond their purpose. It appears, in the evidence, that orders were given that "they must not hurt the white people;" and several whites testified, that when Jack, their leader, knew of their confinement in the stocks, he immediately caused them to be released. It was reported at first, that several white persons had been put to death by the slaves; but this report appears, after a minute enquiry, to have had no foundation in truth.

Such appears to have been the extent of the violence of which the refractory slaves were guilty. We have been unable to discover one well-authenticated fact which goes beyond it. *They do not appear to have taken the life of a single white, to have demolished a single house, or to have set fire to a single cane-piece.*

On the very day on which they struck work, a considerable body of the slaves, amounting to about

a thousand, had a long conference with the Governor, who happened to be riding out in the direction of the disturbed estates. To him they came forward to represent their grievances, and to solicit his interference. They are said to have expressed their loyalty to the King, and their desire to act peaceably; and it does not appear that any one of those present at this conference were guilty of any violence, or even of disrespect towards the Governor: we have reason however to believe, that he quitted them without having made any satisfactory communication on the subject which chiefly agitated them.

The slaves, however, do not seem on this account to have abandoned the hope of effecting their object without violence. Two days more pass, and no cane-piece is consumed, no house is demolished, no life is taken. And when Colonel Leahy advanced with a considerable force of King's troops and militia, the slaves, far from manifesting any hostile purpose, came forward in a large body to confer with that officer. They represented to him the confidence they placed in the friendly feeling of the King's officers towards them, to them they therefore addressed themselves, imploring their protection against the planters, of whose exactions and severities they complained. While thus conferring with Colonel Leahy, the troops

are said to have begun firing upon them; some accounts say, without orders. As the slaves were crowded together, and not expecting an attack, the carnage was considerable. In a few minutes one hundred and fifty, or two hundred, lay dead or wounded upon the spot; the rest fled with precipitation, without offering any resistance whatever. The carnage appears to have been for a time pursued. The Indians were called in and used as blood-hounds to track the fugitives in the woods, and to bring them in alive or dead. Courts Martial were immediately put in requisition to try the prisoners; and we have yet to learn how many hundreds of these wretched beings have perished by the sword and the gallows; some say a thousand, or eight hundred!"

Thus far, we have stated the conduct of the *slaves*, but in order to judge correctly of their fitness to be intrusted with liberty, we must contrast theirs with the conduct of *those who hold them in bondage*. In the preceding narrative, we have already noted the religious intolerance of the Planters and Colonial authorities,—their impious prohibitions of religious worship to their slaves, either in public or in their own houses, without a special licence; the destruction of their religious books, and the severe corporal

punishments which followed the infraction, for conscience' sake, of these infamous restraints and prohibitions:—We have heard, through the public papers, of the horrible vengeance with which these Planters and Colonial authorities have visited the prisoners concerned in the above insurrection: we have heard something of their treatment of the persecuted and martyred Missionary, Smith,—the Parliamentary investigation of it has not yet been concluded,—but it appears from the evidence already adduced, that “Monstrous injustice and scandalous violation of candour, have marked their whole proceedings;”—that they were “as unwarrantable as ever disgraced the law in any part of the British dominions;” that this excellent man, had been illegally tried, unjustly condemned, and persecuted in a manner that would have disgraced an enlightened Government—even in the case of the worst criminal.*

But, as we wish to be *candid*, we will not draw our general estimate of the conduct of the Planters and Colonial authorities from their recent conduct at Demerara alone; we will also refer to their recent conduct in a neighbouring Island, that of Barbadoes, as reported in the same number of the work above

* See the Speeches of Mr. Brougham and Sir J. Mackintosh, in Parliament, June 1841.

quoted, which will afford a pretty fair specimen of the different conduct of *white* and *black* insurgents.

“ We beg to contrast the measure of justice dealt out, in the West-Indies, to rioters, according as they are white or black. In Barbadoes a white mob assemble and commit the most violent outrages, deliberately protracted for several days, in the very midst of the capital of the colony, and in sight of the Government-house; they set the laws at open defiance; they threaten and even attempt the lives of his Majesty's subjects, and force them into exile, after having destroyed their property; they openly denounce vengeance on any one who shall dare to take any part in bringing the delinquents to justice; and promise to these, if brought to trial, all the impunity which a friendly jury, determined to go all lengths in their behalf, can ensure to them. And what is the conduct of the King's Governor? He absolutely refuses to interfere for the protection either of the injured and outraged individuals, or of their property. And when, after having been called upon in vain to prevent the crimes which were about to be perpetrated almost in his view, he issues at length (the crimes having been perpetrated) a proclamation, offering a reward for the detection of the delinquents. The delinquents,

who glory in what they had done, pour deserved contempt on this impotent effort to save appearances: they brave the Governor to his face, and set utterly at nought his tardy interference.

We have no such misplaced lenity, no such limping and powerless exertion of authority to complain of in the case of the *Black* mob of Demerara, as we have to contemplate in that of the nearly contemporaneous *White* mob of Barbadoes. Martial law, blood, slaughter, summary and sweeping execution are promptly resorted to by the local authorities of Demerara. Day after day, and week after week, witness the steady and undeviating march of their retributive vengeance. Hundreds of victims are required to satisfy its demands. And the audacity of the negro in having indulged even a thought or a dream of freedom, and in having dared, somewhat irregularly, (inconsistently at least with plantation discipline,) to demand what it was which the reported benevolence of his Sovereign really designed for him, must be expiated by rivers of blood."

We will carry our investigation a little further, and extend it to the fairest example of West-Indian character. We will enquire what has been the lan-

guage and conduct of the Planters and Authorities of *Jamaica* on the receipt of the late orders in council. Of their official organ, Lord Bathurst, they thus express themselves:—"When the inhabitants of this Island bow the knee before that creature of a day, that tool and organ of the Saints, that fourth-rate fellow of a party, a Colonial Secretary of State—they will richly merit to be stript of their possessions and to be scattered over the earth.—We are not become so weak, nor are our enemies so strong, that we need to dread the event, should the British Ministry be mad enough to persist in their headstrong and ruinous career, and we have a firm hope, that every member of the House of Assembly, will determine not to be awed by the imperious language of the Secretary's dispatch. We will go still farther, and suppose the Commons' House, the Lords' House, and the King himself, to join in a law for the better internal Government of the Colonies, and we will venture to prophecy, that the said law, will be no more regarded than the instructions of Lord Bathurst, which preceded it. It will not be enough to make professions of firmness and independence; it will not be enough to treat with neglect the suggestions of the Secretary; the House of Assembly ought also to express their indignation at the presumption of the individual,—Lord though he

be, who has dared them with his resentment.—
 “Unless, (says his Lordship,) you change the market-day from Sunday to Saturday, and promise not to whip the women, I shall certainly tell Parliament of you.”
 But stop a little, my good Lord, and *recollect that we do not recognise the authority of your Parliament. We know that it can turn you out of your comfortable birth, and even cut off your head, if it pleases to take so much trouble about what is of so little value.*”
 &c. &c.*

ARE MEN WHO HOLD SUCH LANGUAGE AS THIS, WHO PURSUE SUCH A LINE OF CONDUCT AS THAT ABOVE REPORTED, FIT TO BE INTRUSTED WITH ARBITRARY POWER? ARE THEY FIT INSTRUMENTS FOR EXALTING THE CHARACTER OF THE SLAVE POPULATION, AND OF BETTER PREPARING IT FOR LIBERTY?

Behold the two contrasts,—the practical illustration of BLACK and of WHITE principle, in the spirit and conduct of the SLAVE, and in the spirit and conduct of the SLAVE-HOLDER! And now, let an impartial public decide, which of the two stands most

*See the Royal Jamaica Gazette, November 8th, 1823.

in need of reformation,—which of the two is best entitled to liberty,—which may be expected to use it best? The conduct of the two parties, on the ever-memorable occasions above referred to, has put the question out of all doubt. If whips and chains and brands of infamy were ever merited, could ever be employed with advantage,—Justice must now decree that they shall change hands, that the experiment of their efficacy shall now be tried upon the *White West-Indian Insurgents*.

Away then with the puerile cant about *gradual* emancipation. Let the galling ignominious chains of slavery be struck off, at once, from these abused and suffering, these patient, magnanimous creatures; from among whom, martyrs have arisen which would illustrate the brightest records of Christian fidelity and fortitude:—"They continued their religious exercises both in public and private, in spite of the merciless inflictions of the cart whip!" But the day of their redemption from their relentless oppressors, from their *black-hearted, white-faced* task-masters is at hand. The *hour* of retribution is drawing near. And as we see it approaching, let us pause to contemplate and adore that infinite goodness, that inscrutable wisdom, whose counsels and proceedings so far transcend

those of His creatures. How infinitely are His ways, above our ways,—His thoughts above our thoughts! With what sublime ascendancy does His long-suffering patience contrast with our precipitant haste! Towards the proud oppressor and the cruel tyrant, He is “slow to anger”—“long-suffering”—giving them innumerable warnings—affording them space for repentance. In the mean time the sighing of the captive,—the secret groans of the prisoner are all heard,—their patient endurance of their long-protracted and bitter sufferings is marked by Him, who “will deliver the poor that crieth and him that hath no helper;”—will “take the prey out of the hands of the mighty”—“will execute judgment upon the oppressor, and justice for the oppressed.”

“Because judgment is not *speedily* executed, the heart of the wicked is fully set in him to do evil.” “He saith in his (infidel) heart, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it:”—he hardeneth himself in his impious career, until, at length, he saith, “Tush, *there is no God*”.

But, at length, “For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, the Lord will arise” “He shall laugh at the wicked, for He seeth that his

day is coming." "The wicked have drawn out the sword, they have bent the bow, to cast down the poor and needy; their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bow shall be broken." "Their wickedness shall fall upon their own heads," "They shall be taken in their own snare." On the very gibbet erected for poor Mordecai, shall proud Haman himself be exalted. By the very means that these West-Indian tyrants expected to make sure of their prey; to intimidate the British Government from interference; to over-awe and to terrify their trembling captives from all future attempts to escape the cruel grasp of their tormentors; by these very means will their redemption be accomplished.

The terrible inflictions of West-Indian vengeance will not have been endured in vain, the blood of the mangled and martyred slaves will not silently be absorbed in the ground on which it was spilt—No—it cries aloud for retribution. Sacrificial victims, it should seem, are still immolated on the altar of liberty. The blood of Christian martyrs was not more emphatically the seed of the church, than the blood and torments of these poor negroes will prove the certain means of their enfranchisement. There is a point, an impassible barrier beyond which human—even West-

Indian turpitude cannot pass. The slave holders of Barbadoes, Demerara, &c., have reached its utmost limit. There is action and counteraction;—the slaveholders have done their worst—now for the counteraction,—the bloodless triumph of justice and mercy over tyranny as savage and atrocious as was ever recorded in the annals of history.

Had the vengeance of the slave-holder fallen in more stinted measure upon the slave, he might still have been left to the protection of his tender mercies. But *now* we will have the slave *immediately emancipated*. We, the people, the common people of England,—*we ourselves will emancipate him*:—with reverence and awe, we would enter into the solemn pledge, deeply conscious of human frailty and human weakness; remembering that we are mere clay in the hands of the potter;—feeble instruments, which are employed, or wholly set aside in the accomplishment of His purposes—“whose counsels shall stand—who will do all His pleasure.”

But, as the great Controller of events deigns to carry on His operations, in this portion of His dominions, through the agency of means, and chiefly through His agent, man,—so, He disposes and qualifies that agent for the work designed him. Is He not now

touching our hearts with deep sympathy and compassion towards the oppressed negro? Is He not striking them through with deep compunction that we have left him so long in the hands of his merciless tormentors? Is He not opening our eyes to see the simple and obvious means of redeeming him from his long and cruel captivity? Is He not, by the monitions of His own good spirit in our hearts, urging us forward in this great work of justice and mercy? Is He not stimulating us to instant exertion,—“to give no sleep to our eyes, nor slumber to our eye-lids” until we have broken the fetters of West-Indian bondage and set the wretched captive free?

The means are within our own power. We can accomplish this great deliverance with ease, with expedition, with certainty. Let us not suffer another day to intervene between the consciousness of *ability* to discharge this high duty and its serious and earnest exertion. Procrastination, is the thief of resolution as well as of time. It is morally certain that the Abolitionists can, by the simplest means imaginable, by *abstinence from West-India sugar*, put an end to West-Indian slavery. It has been asserted, on good authority, that the object would be accomplished by the abstinence of *one-tenth* of the people. Excepting such as have a personal interest in slavery, the people

or England, almost unanimously, are Abolitionists, in profession at least. Should they, at this critical juncture, relax their exertions, and suffer themselves to nod and sleep again over West-Indian enormities, they will render themselves contemptible in all eyes and will richly deserve the epithets of canting hypocrisy which in the fervor of West-Indian eloquence, have been so copiously bestowed upon them. They will prove to the world that they are mere wordy moralists, empty declaimers, who exhaust their strength in railing against oppression, but will not put forth a finger to lighten the heavy burdens she binds upon the slave.

Abstinence from West-Indian sugar must now be regarded as the *test of their sincerity*, They cannot consistently decline this test, on the plea that the experiment was unsuccessfully made some thirty years ago; for the experiment was then very partially made. It will now, we are confident, be made in good earnest, and those who withhold their co-operation, must be regarded as doing their best to render the experiment abortive; for by so doing, they not only withdraw the weight of their example and influence from the cause of emancipation, but they give it, to all intents and purposes, to the cause of slavery.

We have heard so much and so often of the frightful enormities of West-Indian slavery, that many of us are no longer appalled by their recital; they cease to excite that deep sympathy, that shuddering horror, which their first description awakened. They continue, nevertheless, still to exist, and it is a question well deserving our consideration, whether, being no longer stimulated by the strong excitement of feeling, to rescue the poor negro from his merciless tyrants, we can therefore be excused, on the score of principle, of moral and religious obligation, for passively leaving him in their hands? Whether, by so doing, we are not becoming parties and accomplices in their guilt? Certainly we are,—if, having the power effectually to prevent the endless suffering of one party, and the endless crime of the other, we decline its exertion.

In this common-place subject of West-Indian slavery, there is yet enough to keep *conscience* awake, —to preserve *principle* in life and action, though feeling and sympathy may be in great measure dead. Never was there so inviting an opportunity for the exertion of national virtue, in the prevention of crime and misery, on a scale of such incalculable extent,—by means involving so trifling a sacrifice. So that no language, however severe, can sufficiently reprobate

that inconsiderate indulgence, which, at such a crisis as this, would withhold that sacrifice.

The destruction of West-Indian slavery through the simple means of abstinence from West-Indian sugar, embraces so many and great advantages, obviates so many and great difficulties which obstruct other modes of emancipation, that the mind is overwhelmed by the amazing disparity between the insignificance of the means and the vast importance of the various benefits combined in the end. To illustrate them all as they deserve, would lead us into too wide a field, we must, therefore, confine ourselves to an imperfect outline.

In the first place, it will be a *bloodless triumph* over the most barbarous and sanguinary despotism. It will expel the foulest national disgrace, exalt the national honor and glory without any sacrifice of life or treasure. It will silence for ever the exorbitant and audacious claims of the slave-holder for *compensation*. It will remove the heavy national imports for the maintenance of slavery. This method of eradicating slavery will admonish governments that no force can resist the force of public principle, when vigorously exerted;—that neither fleets nor armies, nor *protecting duties*, can uphold oppression, when the people have virtue enough to resist it. It will

afford to other tyrants, besides West-Indian, a most salutary warning of the weakness as well as wickedness of cruelty, by shewing them how suddenly the tyrant's rod may be converted into an instrument of punishing the tyrant;—but the punishment thus inflicted will have this supreme advantage, that it will not be administered by *retributive*, but by *corrective* justice;—it will not fall upon the slave-holders, with vindictive severity, proportioned either in kind or degree to that which they have themselves inflicted; but will be of such a mild and salutary nature as shall compel them to reform themselves,—to chain and put the muzzle upon their own ferocious passions, and convince them that justice and humanity are stronger safeguards than arbitrary and licentious power.

These, are some of the advantages necessarily resulting from the destruction of West-Indian slavery through abstinence from *West-Indian sugar*. But though this great object *may* be thus advantageously accomplished through this simple means, it will never be secured without spirited and unremitting exertion. Zeal and promptitude, harmonious combination, and determined resolution, will be requisite to give energy and efficacy to the measure.

By engaging in this great work languidly and

partially, we shall only chafe and irritate the slaveholders; we shall only injure their pecuniary interests without reforming their morals. They will never emancipate their slaves till they see us united and firm in the *rejection of their sugar*. We must, by our unanimous, resolute perseverance, convince them that we are IN GOOD EARNEST, that *slave* produce is no longer a marketable commodity,—then, they will cease to offer it. And when they substitute equitable wages for the stimulant of the cart whip;—when they resign their impious claim to the forced, unremunerated labour of the poor negro;—when they have fairly restored him to liberty;—when they regard him as a fellow-creature, treat him no longer as a brute, but as a rational intelligent being;—then we will open fresh accounts with them, and give them the right hand of fellowship.

Till then, we shall consider them as robbers and outlaws, and though there are no gibbets, chains, or ingenious bodily tortures prepared FOR THEM, we shall nevertheless, as in duty bound, exhibit them to the public, as having, by their late conduct, BRANDED THEMSELVES WITH INFAMY, AND INVITED UNIVERSAL REPROBATION.

FINIS.

NOTE.

We professed to confine ourselves, in this enquiry, to the conduct of the slaves in Demerara ; nevertheless, we must not forget the ever memorable declaration of CLARKSON, “That he had not, after a diligent and caudid investigation of the conduct of emancipated slaves, under a great variety of circumstances, comprising a body of more than 500,000, a considerable proportion of whom had been suddenly enfranchised,—found a *single* instance of revenge or abuse of liberty.”